The Image of Justinianic Orthopraxy in Eastern Monastic Literature

From 535 to 546, the emperor Justinian issued a series of imperial constitutions which sought to regulate the activities of monks and monasteries. Unprecedented in its scope, this legislative programme marked an attempt by the emperor to bring ascetics firmly under the purview of his government. Taken together, its rulings legislated on virtually every aspect of the ascetic life, prescribing a detailed model of 'orthopraxy,' or correct behaviour, to which the emperor demanded monks adhere. However, whilst it is clichéd to evoke Justinian's status as a reformer of the law, scholars continue to view these orthopraxic rulings with some uncertainty. This is a reflection, in part, of the difficulties faced when attempting to judge the extent to which they were ever adopted or enforced. Studies of the emperor's divisive religious policies have tended to focus instead upon matters of doctrine and, in particular, Justinian's efforts to enforce his view of orthodoxy upon anti-Chalcedonian, monastic dissidents.

This paper builds upon recent work to argue that the effects of Justinian's monastic legislation were, in fact, widely felt.[1] It will argue that accounts of the mid-sixth century by Eastern monastic authors reveal widespread familiarity with the rulings on ascetic practice contained in the emperor's *Novels*. Their reception reveals the extent of imperial power over ascetics during this period, frequently presented as one in which the 'holy man' exercised almost boundless social and spiritual authority. I will concentrate on three main examples to illustrate this point, chosen to represent a suitable cross-section of the contemporary monastic movement: Cyril of Scythopolis' *Life of Sabas*, the *Life of Z'ura* in the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* by John of Ephesus, and the Coptic texts which detail the career of the Egyptian monastic leader, Abraham of Farshut.[2]

ORTHOPRAXY IN JUSTINIAN'S MONASTIC LEGISLATION

Firstly, however, we must discuss Justinian's monastic laws in greater detail. These fall into two main categories. The first comprises early legislation, issued between 528 and 533, found in Book One of the *Codex Iustinianus.*[3] However, the focus of this paper is the second group, made up of later, 'new laws' (*Novellae Constitutiones*), or *Novels*.[4] The promulgation of the monastic *Novels* from 535 to 546 followed in the wake of a far broader programme of legal codification and reform, overseen by Justinian

and his advisors, which had mainly sought to resolve the complexities of a Roman legal system in which multiple sources of law were often in conflict.[5] It had led to the production of definitive collections, both of imperial constitutions (the *Code*), and of the opinions of earlier Roman jurists (the *Digest*). At the same time, Justinian's officials had produced the *Institutes*, a new, imperial textbook for law students, which enshrined the emperor's reforms in the curriculum. First issued in 529, the *Code* was amended and reissued in 534 in a second edition, which survives. But, whilst it is thought that Justinian later intended a further edition to include post-534 constitutions, this was never realised.[6] Thus the *Novels* remained a separate collection.

The initial wave of Justinianic legislation preserved in the *Code* dealt primarily with the legal position of monasteries, their property, and the rights of their members and benefactors.[7] Such matters were also discussed in the *Novels*, but virtually all rulings on questions of ascetic orthopraxy belong to this later group. Two laws of 529 and 530 are exceptions to this rule.[8] But their provisions, which banned mixed monasteries, and gave advice on the conduct of abbatial elections, were eventually repeated and elaborated in the *Novels*. Later laws published up to the year of Justinian's death in 565 made further reference to monks and monasteries, but contained no additional orthopraxic rulings.[9] After 546, Justinian increasingly relied upon the Church to enshrine his religious policies in canon law, most notably at the Council of Constantinople in 553.

The *Novels*' rulings on ascetic orthopraxy were not the first imperial laws to broach the subject. Earlier emperors had already legislated against ascetic practices considered harmful to the public good.[10] In 370, the emperor Valens had denounced some monks, described as "devotees of idleness," demanding that those with civic obligations return to their cities.[11] A short-lived law of Theodosius I, issued in 390, then ordered all ascetics to dwell in deserts, and to leave the cities altogether.[12] It was later repealed by the same emperor in 392.[13] Remaining imperial monastic legislation before Justinian largely dealt with similar legal and economic questions to those addressed in the emperor's earlier laws, as preserved in the *Code*. But, such laws served as only one source of instruction to ascetics on matters of orthopraxy before the mid-sixth century. Of far greater importance in this period were two others: the instructions

bequeathed by holy men to their own disciples, whether contained in written monastic 'Rules,' or in hagiographies and other ascetic discourses; and the canons of the Church Councils.

Both traditions informed Justinian's legislation on the ascetic life. Already in the fourth century, spirited debate was underway within the Church as to its proper form. As many scholars have noted, Christian leaders of this period often sought to curb the perceived excesses of monks engaged in extreme practices of self-mortification, or of 'wandering' holy men, whose appearance was frequently a cause of unrest in the Empire's cities.[14] Basil of Caesarea, Pachomius, Rabbula of Edessa, and John Cassian, among others, famously issued Rules which envisaged a highly-structured, coenobitic monastic life, and demanded ascetic 'moderation' from its adherents.

However, the most wide-ranging definition of ascetic orthopraxy before 535 was given in the canons agreed at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Their rulings are thought to reveal something of the anxiety felt by the Late Antique ecclesiastical establishment toward an increasingly unruly monastic movement. Only two years earlier, monks led by the Syrian ascetic Barsauma had terrorised the Church Fathers assembled for the Second Council of Ephesus. On this occasion, Flavian, the archbishop of Constantinople, had been so badly beaten by monks, that he died shortly afterwards.[15] Those present at Chalcedon sought to control troubling ascetic behaviour of this kind by fundamentally curtailing monastic independence.[16]

As part of this agenda, the Council issued a number of milestone, orthopraxic rulings. Placing the monasteries of each diocese under the authority of their bishop, Canon Four also ordered monks to remain cloistered wherever possible and to commit themselves to the pursuit of "silence" (*hesychia*). It condemned those who "shroud themselves in monastic garb to disrupt the churches and public business."[17] Other canons banned monks from wandering, engaging in secular professions, or from retaining some of their property for personal use. Some repeated or confirmed earlier Church or imperial rulings. Thus, Canon Sixteen reiterated the ban on monks or nuns marrying, whilst Canon Eighteen imitated imperial law in specifically forbidding monastic "conspiracy" against the episcopate. Chalcedon issued the first detailed, universal orthopraxic guidelines to Eastern ascetics, complementing, but also superseding, local monastic traditions. For Leo Ueding, it was the Council's

canons that made possible the wide-ranging rulings on the ascetic life later adopted in the *Novels*.[18] In *Novels* 131, Justinian reissued an earlier edict of the emperor Marcian, which enshrined the canons in civil law. But, his legislation also contained much that was original.

The first Justinianic law relevant to our discussion appeared in 535, with the promulgation of *Novels* 5. This was followed by a series of constitutions concerned with matters of ascetic behaviour: *Novels* 79 (dated March 538), 67 (May 538), 133 (March 539), and 123 (May 546). A survey of the rulings contained in these laws was previously undertaken by Branko Granić, Ueding, Charles Frazee, and Bénédicte Lesieur among others.[19] Nevertheless, it would seem necessary to reiterate that, together, they prescribed an orthopraxic model to ascetics more comprehensive than any previously conceived.

The preface to *Novels* 5 set out its purpose as to provide rules which "must be followed in order to lead a holy life."[20] Its first chapter prescribed, in some detail, the procedure for founding a monastery. In all instances, the permission of the local bishop must be sought. The bishop, for his part, should consecrate the ground on which the monastery was due to be built.[21] Justinian then gave guidance on admission to the ascetic life. New monks were ordered to complete a three-year noviciate, before they could become permanently enrolled.[22] Monasteries themselves were to be coenobitic, their members sharing a common life, eating and praying together, and sleeping in a single dormitory. They should elect their abbots, the emperor ordered, according to their holiness, rather than their seniority.[23]

Some experienced ascetics might be permitted to withdraw from the community as hermits. But the *Novel* envisaged that they would form only a small minority of wider monastic population. In all cases, monks were to remain within the monastery to which they had first pledged themselves. Justinian sought to prevent them from travelling by ordering that none of the property which they had donated on admission to their monastery could ever be transferred to another.[24]

Later laws often repeated or amended the provisions of *Novels* 5, its invasive rulings setting the tone of subsequent legislation. However, in the years that followed, imperial scrutiny was applied to an ever-wider range of ascetic activities. The effect was to produce a remarkably stringent, official definition of orthoprax ascetic behaviour. But in prescribing it, Justinian promoted a model of monasticism which

departed significantly from that outlined in 451. No longer simply content to reinforce monks' loyalty to their bishops, he sought to succeed where the Church Fathers had failed, by enforcing the exclusion of ascetics from the social and political life of the Empire.

Various restrictions were introduced to this effect. Some sought to render unnecessary business dealings between monks and laypeople. *Novels* 67 ordered bishops to ensure that every monastery in their diocese was endowed with an income sufficient to maintain its members.[25] Elsewhere, Justinian reaffirmed the need for monks to support themselves through manual labour.[26] As Daniel Caner has noted, earlier arguments for the cloistering of monks had usually emphasised the importance of manual labour, as a means of achieving monastic self-sufficiency, and thus avoiding unnecessary contact with the world.[27] For Justinian, monastic seclusion itself was the goal, even if episcopal subsidies were required to fund it. Elsewhere, ascetics were no longer permitted to seek redress in the public courts. *Novels* 79 ordered the removal of all cases involving them from the civil court system, to be tried instead by bishops.[28] *Novels* 123 later prescribed the appointment of advocates to represent monks and nuns at court, so that they need not leave their monasteries at all.[29]

However, the full scope of Justinian's programme for the segregation of ascetics from the wider, Late Roman populace was revealed with the promulgation of *Novels* 133 in March 539. In this law, the emperor reminded abbots that it was compulsory for monasteries to be coenobitic communities, and that male and female monasteries must be not built in close proximity.[30] But, he now also ruled that they should conform to a standard design, enclosed by strong walls, and only accessible by one or two entrances.[31] Separate accommodation blocks or partitions built between monks' sleeping quarters were to be demolished.[32] A senior monk was to be posted on the gate at all times to prevent the other brothers from leaving.[33] But, if a monk was required to leave on monastery business, it was considered preferable that they should be a eunuch.[34]

Elsewhere in the *Novel*, ascetics were explicitly excluded from various public spaces and events. Justinian prohibited them from visiting taverns or theatres.[35] But, with perhaps less justification, he forbade those who had to leave their monastery on Sundays to receive the Eucharist from speaking to the laity after church.[36] Treated as a source of social contagion, ascetics were to be quarantined as a

means of guarding against civil unrest. Now officially, permanently cloistered, female ascetics were even banned from attending each other's funerals, lest they should come into contact with male pallbearers.[37]

The ascetic ideal of solitude served as a common trope of early Christian literature. Justinian, in the *Novels*, may partly be seen to exploit this tradition, which played to monasticism's desert origin, and an enduring image of the holy man, first popularised by Athanasius' *Life of Antony*. However, as the history of religious controversy in our period amply shows, ascetics were frequently unable, or unwilling, to live in isolation. Thus, to ensure that his orthopraxic rulings were respected, Justinian sought to foster a culture of surveillance, in which monastic seclusion became self-reinforcing. *Novels* 133 envisaged that, forced to spend all their time together, monks would quickly come to police one another's actions and to suppress their wayward brothers.[38] It was apparently expected that constant supervision would resolve the problem of unwelcome ascetic involvement in Church and 'secular' politics.

To justify these extraordinary rulings, Justinian and his advisers appealed to the traditional, triumphalist rhetoric of imperial law. The preface to *Novels* 133 characteristically argued that the emperor's intervention in monastic affairs was appropriate, since he had received the right from God to legislate on any matter of his choosing.[39] It claimed that his reforms were motivated by concern for the wellbeing, not just of monks, but of all the subjects in his care. Ascetics, it suggested, had a special role to play in ensuring the continued prosperity of the Empire.[40] Chapter five of *Novels* 133 went on to neatly paraphrase the emperor's view of their "sacred duties":

> "For if these men offer prayers to God on behalf the State with clean hands and pure spirits, it is manifest that the armies and the cities shall fare well - for how could the greatest peace and good order not exist, when God is kindly and gracious – and the earth will bear us its fruits and the sea will give us its goods, these prayers joining the benevolence of God for the entire Empire."[41]

The *Novels*' monastic reforms were presented as crucial to the broader project of Late Roman imperial renewal. In his laws, Justinian equated monastic discipline with the success of his armies in the field. However cynical these claims might have been, they provided a philosophical defence for the removal

of ascetics from public life. The *Novels* commonly evoked the need for monks to remain "pure," so that their prayers were effective.[42] This could only be achieved, it was argued, by isolating them completely from the world.

TRACING THE *NOVELS* IN THE *LIVES*

However, for all the hyperbole found in Justinian's monastic laws, it has proven difficult to judge what effect they actually had on patterns of ascetic behaviour. We may be inclined to assume that many of the more exacting provisions contained in the *Novels* proved difficult, if not impossible, to enforce. It is clear that the mid-sixth century did not witness the demise of the diverse practices which they had forbidden. The startling variety of ascetic lifestyles evident in the writings of John Moschus, a century later, would suggest that they had little long-term effect. There is, moreover, no evidence that monks and nuns suddenly disappeared from public view, whilst the persistent schism over Chalcedon had also, by Justinian's reign, placed many of the Council's ascetic opponents beyond the institutional reach of the established Church.[43]

Nevertheless, questions of ascetic orthopraxy were clearly a persistent preoccupation of imperial lawmakers in the 530s and 540s. Both they, and the emperor, had presumably been made well-aware of the limited efficacy of the law by their own attempts to strengthen its application. The energy spent on the monastic *Novels* would therefore suggest that they were expected to have some effect, even if their influence is less immediately visible than Justinian's rhetoric would have us believe. But, are any traces of their provisions visible in the writings of their intended recipients: the hagiographies and other religious literature produced by Eastern monastic authors?

An article by Bénédicte Lesieur has recently sought to address this question in the case of the Monastery of Seridos at Thavatha, near Gaza. Assembling references to the ascetic life at Thavatha, Lesieur considered the potential influence of imperial and ecclesiastical rulings over its presentation in works composed by local monks, the *Instructions* of Dorotheus of Gaza, and the *Questions and Answers* collection associated with the monastery's famous hermits, Barsanuphius and John. As we might

expect, she concluded that the relationship between the two was "nuanced," and that the monastery never fully adhered to the orthopraxic model set out by the *Novels*.[44] Nevertheless, Lesieur thought it clear that such a relationship existed and that, in spite of the 'limited' application of Justinian's legislation, "monasticism, willingly or unwillingly, adapted itself to a framework fixed by the official authorities of the Empire."[45]

As Lesieur notes, the *Questions and Answers* contain many scenes in which Thavatha's monastic leaders appear to parrot the provisions of the *Novels*. However, she regarded this as something of a *trompe l'oeil*, arguing that the collection, in fact, also portrays many clear infractions of Justinian's legislation by the monastery's members.[46] Importantly, she established that not all parallels between the *Novels* and the advice given by Barsanuphius and John are evidence of imperial influence. In some cases, ascetic life at Thavatha may have owed something to earlier monastic Rules containing similar provisions, notably that of Rabbula.[47] Justinian's laws may therefore occasionally be seen to have affirmed practices which already existed.

However, these reservations notwithstanding, it seems clear from Lesieur's analysis that the *Questions and Answers* responded to the imperial, orthopraxic model set out in the *Novels*. The 'answers' given by Barsanuphius and John faithfully mirrored the rulings on coenobitism given in Justinian's legislation, even appearing to endorse the burdensome restrictions placed upon the physical design of monasteries by *Novels* 133.[48] The investiture of Seridos' successor, Aelianus, as abbot of Thavatha, was overseen by the bishop of Gaza, in accordance with rules on abbatial elections first prescribed in *Novels* 5.[49] From the letters, it is apparent that Thavatha's monks had regular dealings with Gaza's civil officials, whilst also appearing to discuss the enforcement of imperial law with their correspondents.[50] Elsewhere, additional references in the texts to the teachings of Origen and the condemnation of the Three Chapters, both the subject of imperial edicts issued in 543, bear witness to the reception of contemporary Justinianic religious legislation by local ascetics.[51]

The individual letters which form the *Questions and Answers* are undated. However, François Neyt has shown that they contain references to events in Justinian's reign, which conclusively demonstrate the floruit of the Seridos Monastery to have been the 520s-540s: a period which broadly coincides with the

appearance of the monastic *Novels*.[52] At some point from the 540s onwards, it is thought that the collection was arranged and edited by a compiler, presumably one of the monastery's members. Produced in this context, it would seem no coincidence that, as Lesieur observes, its depiction of the ascetic life at Thavatha conforms "not only to the letter, but also to the spirit of civil and religious legislation."[53] The apparent references to Justinian's orthopraxic rulings in the *Questions and Answers* seem to represent an attempt by the monks of Seridos to demonstrate their adherence to the emperor's laws.

This view is supported by other parts of the collection, where Thavatha's hermits give studiously uncontroversial advice on major questions of doctrine and Church politics, apparently fearful of offending the authorities. Barsanuphius and John are claimed to have forbidden their followers from taking part in the contemporary debate over 'Origenism,' urging them to occupy themselves with prayer, as Justinian had ordered.[54] A further series of petitions on the subject of a controversial episcopal election at Gaza saw them launch into an elaborate defence of the authority of bishops over monks.[55]

Lesieur rightly notes that the opinions expressed by Barsanuphius and John on these matters echoed rulings which the *Novels* had inherited from earlier orthopraxic traditions established by Rabbula and the canons of Chalcedon. But we find little evidence of their reception in Gaza before the reign of Justinian. In the decades which preceded the production of the *Questions and Answers*, Gaza's monasteries had been actively engaged in the controversy over Chalcedon and its ascetics firmly at odds with the episcopate.[56] The lengthy professions of support for the ecclesiastical authorities found in the letters, then, seem to be a mid-sixth century response to Justinian's laws, which, after 535, reinforced episcopal powers over monks. Though not entirely convincing, material of this kind established Barsanuphius and John as champions of Justinianic orthopraxy.

What role the compiler of the *Questions and Answers* may have had in creating this effect is unclear. However, by the latter part of Justinian's reign, it would seem that Thavatha's monks had good reason to assert their orthoprax credentials. At some point between 552 and 564, an investigation into the governance of the Seridos Monastery was ordered by Eustochius, the patriarch of Jerusalem.[57] Voicing suspicions already raised by some of the monastery's members, the Church authorities had apparently

accused Seridos of inventing Barsanuphius, who had not been seen for many years, and of writing the hermit's letters himself. According to Evagrius, troops sent by the patriarch to break open Barsanuphius' cell were ultimately prevented from carrying out their task by the appearance of a miraculous fireball. But, whatever the details of this episode, it saw the monks of Seridos forced to defend themselves against accusations of heteropraxy.[58] Viewed in this context, the aftermath of Eustochius' intervention would seem a likely point at which to situate the compiler's work. He, in turn, may have crafted the impression of careful conformity to the *Novels'* orthopraxic rulings seen above.

This is perhaps most strongly suggested by the correspondence which deals with the aforementioned episcopal election at Gaza. Neyt has shown that the events described could only have taken place in ca. 518 or 527, as the letters refer to the recent death of an emperor.[59] Local Christians were clearly bitterly at odds over who should occupy the see, having organised themselves into rival 'factions,' possibly representing different sides in the dispute over Chalcedon. However, if the *Questions and Answers* are to be believed, when asked what position his followers should take, Barsanuphius' only advice was to support whichever candidate received the approval of the patriarch in Jerusalem. Accompanied by statements of loyalty to the episcopate composed in language reminiscent of the *Novels*, this part of the collection would seem to have been altered in light of events in the 550s or 560s. It even appears to retroject the provisions of Justinian's monastic laws into the period before 535, demonstrating Thavatha's longstanding commitment to imperial policy, as a means of shielding its monks from further criticism by opponents within the Church. But are the apparent references to imperial legislation found in the *Questions and Answers* an isolated example? Or might they alert us to a wider phenomenon?

With this question in mind, we turn to the three prominent monastic leaders first named at the beginning of this paper: Sabas, Z'ura, and Abraham of Farshut. Sabas (d. 532), the subject of the longest of the Greek hagiographies composed by the Palestinian monk, Cyril of Scythopolis, was the founder of seven monasteries in the Judaean Desert. Z'ura, a famous Mesopotamian stylite, was commemorated in a short, Syriac *Life* composed by John of Ephesus in the 560s, as part of a wider anthology. Abraham, though a more obscure figure, led the powerful Egyptian monastic 'federation' established by Pachomius, during the reign of Justinian. Two fragmentary Coptic panegyrics of Abraham, together

with an excerpt on his career from another text, taken from manuscripts dated to the tenth-eleventh century, were recently published by James Goehring.[60] Between them, these monastic leaders belonged to three distinct currents of mid-sixth century Eastern asceticism, which reflected the wider geographical, confessional, and linguistic fault lines of Justinian's empire. But each is the subject of a hagiographical tradition which appears to show the influence of the *Novels* over monasteries and their members.

In all three cases, this influence is made apparent during scenes in which the holy man is shown to debate religious policy with Justinian during a personal encounter with the emperor at the imperial court in Constantinople. In the *Life of Sabas*, Cyril claims that his monastery's founder met with Justinian following the Samaritan Revolt of 529 to petition him for tax relief for the affected provinces of Palestine, and for funds to rebuild their churches.[61] According to John's *Life*, Z'ura travelled to Constantinople to complain of the treatment of monks in his province, having been forced to vacate his pillar by 'synodite' (Chalcedonian) oppressors.[62] Abraham was supposedly summoned before the emperor and deposed, following complaints made by Chalcedonian opponents within the Pachomian federation. But no date is given either for this, or for Z'ura's visit, in the texts.

We must view these accounts with some suspicion. Debate between ascetics and emperors at court is a relatively common feature of Late Antique hagiographies, usually serving to demonstrate the holy man's freedom of speech (*parrhêsia*) before the authorities, and we may reasonably doubt whether the conversations described took place.[63] In his recent study, Goehring convincingly argued that Abraham's appearance before Justinian 'has all the hallmarks of a literary creation.'[64] As mentioned above, the White Monastery Codices GB and GC which contain the main accounts of Abraham's career were products of a much later period, with the texts themselves appearing to betray an uncertain grasp of events in Justinian's era.

However, even if Abraham did not travel to Constantinople in person, there is no reason to dispute the central claim that the emperor deposed him, or that this occurred with the connivance of some of his followers. As Goehring has shown, the deposition is referred to in other Coptic sources and was a probable catalyst for the mid-sixth century collapse of the Pachomian movement.[65] And whilst we may

question whether Cyril or John accurately reported the contents of their heroes' conversations with Justinian, it is very difficult to believe that they invented the encounters entirely. As will be discussed, Z'ura's presence in the imperial city, at least, is widely corroborated. However, for our purposes, the value of these Constantinopolitan episodes depends, not upon whether they themselves were real historical events, but upon the references which they appear to make to the orthopraxic model set out in the *Novels*.

The Life of Sabas

Such references are perhaps most clearly visible in Cyril's *Life of Sabas*.[66] The Constantinopolitan sections of the *Life*, and those found in the *Life of Z'ura*, were recently presented by Hartmut Leppin as evidence of the reverence and deference shown to ascetics by Justinian and his court.[67] However, Cyril's work far more readily points to a narrative campaign mounted in the opposite direction, which sought to endear the 'Sabaite' monasteries to the emperor. The text, as a whole, would seem to contain echoes of the *Novels*, not dissimilar to those identified by Lesieur in the Seridos monastery texts.[68] Early in the *Life*, Cyril establishes his subject as a monastic "lawgiver," who shares the emperor's concern for the maintenance of order among ascetics.[69] Appointed as an archimandrite responsible for discipline in Palestine's desert monasteries, he is said to have enjoyed close relations with successive bishops of Jerusalem, acting with their help to suppress unauthorised monastic foundations.[70]

However, Cyril is also careful to depict the ascetic life in Sabas' own monasteries as a profoundly Justinianic experience. In keeping with the provisions of *Novels* 5, the *Life* claims that he constructed a "Small Coenobium," in which candidates for the ascetic life would receive appropriate training, overseen by experienced monks.[71] Of these, the majority would graduate to join one of the Sabaite order's other monasteries, with some eventually becoming anchorites. The daily routine of their communities was apparently the same that prescribed by *Novels* 133. Cyril presents Sabas himself as an archetypal Justinianic monk, engaged at all times in either prayer or manual labour.[72] Elsewhere, the

Life couches the holy man's petition for the relief of Palestine's churches and monasteries in language reminiscent of *Novel*s 79, arguing that imperial funds were needed to maintain the "purity" of the faith.[73]

Of themselves, these apparent parallels between the *Life of Sabas* and the *Novels* are not decisive evidence that Cyril was engaged in similar editorial practices to his contemporaries at Thavatha, potentially retrojecting Justinian's monastic laws into the period before 535. But the case for such a view would seem stronger, when we consider the prevalence of Justinianic language in his other works, most notably the *Life of Euthymius*. Euthymius, Sabas' mentor, was the founder of three earlier monasteries, established in the Judaean Desert in the first decades of the fifth century. His *Life*, written at the same time as the *Life of Sabas*, was apparently conceived as part of the same, broad project for the promotion of the Sabaite community, who were claimed to have preserved Euthymius' ascetic teachings.

An early scene of the *Life of Euthymius* has its subject provide an oral monastic 'rule' to his disciples with strong, Justinianic connotations. According to Cyril, Euthymius, like *Novels* 133, regarded the "sole purpose" of the ascetic life to be "to please God through prayer and fasting."[74] With echoes of *Novels* 5, he ordered his followers to be "always sober and awake," to possess nothing, to pray and eat together in silence, and not to engage in secular business.[75] Anxious to maintain the ascetic "purity" which had also preoccupied Justinian, Euthymius encouraged his followers to isolate themselves from society. When anti-Chalcedonians seized control of the Jerusalem episcopate from 451 to 453, he supposedly cut all contact with the outside world until they were overthrown.[76] He subsequently refused to meet with senior local figures, such as the empress Eudocia, or Anastasius, the Chalcedonian bishop of Jerusalem.[77] Perhaps awkwardly, Euthymius' main monastery had not been a coenobium, as prescribed by the *Novels*, but a community of hermits. However, Cyril was seemingly anxious that even this should be reconciled with Justinian's legislation. The *Life* dubiously claims that Euthymius had strictly barred inexperienced ascetics from joining his *Laura* at Khan al-Ahmar, and had even left instructions for its conversion to a coenobium on his deathbed.[78]

According to Cyril, Euthymius died in 473; Sabas in 532. But the idea that the *Lives* recast the ascetic practice of earlier generations to fit the orthopraxic model prescribed by the *Novels* is also supported

by the clear appeals to Justinianic policy found elsewhere in the texts. These were recently summarised in a survey by Phil Booth, building upon work by Bernard Flusin and Daniël Hombergen, among others.[79] Flusin, following observations made by Eduard Schwartz, conclusively demonstrated that Cyril quoted Justinian's rulings on orthodoxy, when describing the doctrinal position of Sabas and his followers.[80] Hombergen has since shown that a similar recycling of imperial religious policy is visible in the *Lives*' presentation of the 'Origenist Controversy,' which gripped Palestine's monasteries from the 530s to 550s, and which also features in the *Questions and Answers* of Barsanuphius and John.[81]

The precise character of the 'Origenist' party opposed by the Sabaites in this dispute remains a matter of some debate.[82] Hombergen considered it likely that they were primarily united, as a group, by a shared interest in the spiritual writings of Evagrius of Pontus. But in Cyril's depiction of the stance taken by Sabas' followers in the Controversy, they, and their spiritual father before them, are shown in all events to champion the theological position adopted by Justinian. More precisely, their views conform perfectly with the rulings of the 553 Council of Constantinople, condemning both Origen, on the one hand, and the authors of the Three Chapters, on the other. Cyril's short *Life of Cyriacus* clearly refers to the Council's anathemas in its description of Sabas' anti-Origenist beliefs.[83] But, perhaps less plausibly, the *Life of Sabas* also claims that its subject had earlier condemned Theodore of Mopsuestia, one of the Three Chapters authors.[84] Theodore's person and writings were first anathematised by Justinian in 543, eleven years after Sabas' death, a verdict which was then upheld by the Council of 553. But, as Hombergen has shown, prior to this he was held in good standing by Chalcedonians and Cyril's claim appears deeply suspect.

The *Life of Sabas'* depiction of the encounter between Sabas and Justinian in Constantinople, however, would seem to contain an analogous appeal to the emperor's views on ascetic orthopraxy. Booth has described how, during one of three interviews between them, Cyril has Sabas retreat to a corner of the palace in prayer, whilst Justinian and his advisors deliberate on whether or not to grant his requests. A disciple accompanying the holy man is claimed to have admonished him for not attempting to influence this process, prompting Sabas to exclaim, "They are doing their work, child. Let us do ours!"[85] Here, as Booth has noted, Cyril appears to imitate the 'political philosophy' expounded by *Novels* 133, in

which Justinian had described a divinely-mandated division of labour between ascetics and their earthly rulers.[86]

But, we may see this as only one of several likely appeals to the rhetoric of the *Novels* in the *Life's* account of Sabas' time in Constantinople. Elsewhere, Cyril has the emperor offer to provide the Sabaite monasteries with an annual income, "so that they might pray for the State placed in our care.[87]" Though admitting that Sabas did subsequently accept a substantial sum of gold from Justinian, the *Life* has him politely reject this offer, perhaps anxious to avoid accusations of monastic begging. Nevertheless, in turning it down, the holy man appears to invoke the language of *Novels 133*, describing his followers to the emperor as, "the ones who are praying for your Piety.[88]"

A later scene set at Constantinople describes an encounter between Sabas and the empress Theodora, who asks him to pray that she might conceive a child. Disapproving of her anti-Chalcedonian views, he is unable to grant this request, but tactfully blesses her instead, proclaiming that, "God, the lord of all, shall guard your empire.[89]" He later repeats this blessing, adding that "God will sustain your empire in piety and victory.[90]" At first glance, this apparent affront to Theodora might undermine the suggestion that Cyril sought to appeal to her husband's rulings. But, the *Life* attempts to strike a difficult balance by showing appropriate respect for the late empress, whilst also demonstrating Sabas' unerring commitment to Justinian's own, Neochalcedonian doctrine. A similar effort is also underway in an earlier section of the text, in which Sabas had met with the emperor Anastasius, who was also sympathetic to the anti-Chalcedonian cause.[91] In both cases, Cyril seems to avoid potential awkwardness by appealing directly to the political philosophy of the *Novels*. Sabas loyally fulfils his ascetic obligations, as defined by the law, assiduously praying for the Empire's success and the good fortune of its rulers, regardless of their beliefs.

However, strikingly, during the aforementioned meetings between Sabas and Justinian, Cyril also appears to refer to the specific, rhetorical link which *Novels* 133 had made between ascetic prayers and the success of Roman arms. As we saw above, the *Novel's* fifth chapter had envisaged that the intercession of holy men would bring the Empire victory and good government, securing the "fruits" and "produce" of the land and sea. Cyril has Sabas appeal to Justinian in precisely these terms, when

asking him to aid Palestine. According to the *Life*, Sabas' prayers following the fulfilment of his requests resulted in "two victories" so great, that they exceeded the achievements of any previous emperor.[92] This had supposedly delivered into Justinian's hands "half of the land and the sea.[93]" Here, Cyril may be seen to exploit the wording of *Novels* 133, using Sabas as a mouthpiece to quote back to the emperor his own legislation.

Like the Seridos Monastery texts, the *Life of Sabas* seems to betray its author's knowledge of the rulings contained in Justinian's monastic *Novels*. But, Cyril too appears to have specifically adapted the story of his monastery's founder to express his support for the emperor's policies. These findings would seem to strengthen the view taken by Flusin that the *Lives*, which display a clear preoccupation with events at court, were written with an imperial audience in mind. By the time of the texts' composition in the 550s, the Sabaites had become regular petitioners of Justinian, with emissaries stationed in Constantinople. If Cyril is to be believed, then Sabas himself had obtained impressive concessions from the emperor during his visit to the city in 529. But, having recently waged much of their decades-long struggle against 'Origenism' at Constantinople, Cyril and his brothers were presumably familiar with the inner workings of the palace themselves, and possibly emboldened to press their case again at a time when Justinian had established himself as a patron of the Palestinian Church.[94]

New work on the manuscript tradition of the *Lives* by István Perczel may, in fact, point to the existence of two versions of Cyril's work, one of which was explicitly produced for a Constantinopolitan audience.[95] In a recent paper, he has argued that an early Syriac translation of the *Lives* of Sabas and Euthymius acts as a witness to another version, composed for a local, Palestinian audience, and belonging to a lower register than the Atticising manuscripts reproduced by Schwartz' critical edition. He regards this as the original Cyril, and sees the Atticising *Lives* as the product of a later process, in which the texts were adapted and embellished for use in the imperial capital. He suggests that this work may have been undertaken by a group of 'Constantinopolitan metaphrasts.'

Perczel acknowledges that this is one hypothesis for the potential relationship between the two versions of the *Lives*. It may also be possible that both existed from an early date, or else, that the Syriac translation may even have simplified an Atticising original. However, all three scenarios ultimately

seem to point to an original reception of Cyril's work at Constantinople in the sixth century. As Perczel notes, they must have already, previously circulated in the city at an earlier date, for later metaphrasts to have accessed them. But, I would suggest that the texts' elaborate use of the *Novels* and other Justinianic legislation can be most readily explained, if this date was roughly contemporary to the composition of the *Lives* in the late 550s. It seems clear that the Sabaites hoped to obtain some immediate benefit from recycling this material, which serves no clear purpose, other than to inveigle the imperial court of the mid-sixth century.

However, like the monks of Seridos, Cyril and his brothers belonged to Chalcedonian monasteries in communion with Justinian and his bishops. What image of the *Novels*, if any, can we expect to find in the writings of the empire's ascetic dissidents?

The Life of Z'ura

Of these, perhaps the most radical alternative to Cyril's account is that found in the *Life of Z'ura*. Z'ura, far from offering praise to Justinian, is claimed by his biographer to have lambasted the emperor and his advisors during their encounter at the imperial court. The *Life* records that he became embroiled in a vicious argument with Justinian over the acceptance of the Council of Chalcedon, before cursing him with a mystery illness.[96] According to John, Z'ura eventually agreed to cure the emperor, who was subsequently amenable to his requests, regularly taking the holy man's counsel and installing him in a villa at Sycae.[97] Defeating a later attempt by the visiting Pope, Agapetus, to have him removed from Constantinople, Z'ura was eventually exiled from the city, together with other anti-Chalcedonian leaders.[98] As Philip Wood has argued, John's account advances what is effectively the opposite orthopraxic attitude to that seen in Cyril's *Life of Sabas*. Z'ura's *Life*, and the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* as a collection, can be seen to mount a spirited defence of local, ascetic tradition, in defiance of emperors and bishops.[99]

Indeed, it is clear that Z'ura himself certainly was not an ascetic in the Justinianic mould. A lone stylite like his predecessor, Habib, his reputation for healing had gained him followers among the rural

population of Sophanene.[100] In common with many of John's subjects, he is claimed to have rejected the cloistered life, choosing instead to oversee the provision of charity to the poor. As Susan Ashbrook Harvey has shown, throughout the *Life*, Z'ura remains loyal to an orthopraxic model first established on his pillar, which combined austere ascetic discipline with close involvement in the affairs of the world.[101] Elsewhere in the *Lives*, John reveals his sympathy for a wide array of ascetic lifestyles still held in reverence in Mesopotamia, but condemned by the *Novels*. Wood has suggested that, by celebrating one such group, the *idihaye*, a local variety of 'holy fools,' John "pursues a strand of Syriac writing that had become disenchanted with the wealth accumulated in coenobitic monasticism and that had used the language of an earlier Mesopotamian 'proto-monasticism' to make its case heard.[102]" But this can also be seen to have represented an anti-Chalcedonian riposte to the orthopraxic model set out in the *Novels*.

John's account of Z'ura's quarrel with Justinian has traditionally been seen as a symptom of ongoing doctrinal division over Chalcedon. Indeed, the *Life* describes the conversation between them as almost exclusively concerned with the Council and its Christology. However, the original complaint which led Z'ura to Constantinople would seem to have been a matter of orthopraxy, rather than orthodoxy. John refers to Z'ura's oppressors as 'synodites,' who had sought to bring the holy man into communion with them. But in only acting to remove him from his pillar, it would seem that they also objected to his ascetic lifestyle. His punishment was remarkably lenient when compared to those of the many other anti-Chalcedonian heroes portrayed in the *Lives*, who were usually subjected to brutal violence or exile. We may also note that Z'ura had gone to Justinian, according to John, partly to address the spread of Chalcedonianism, but also to report the "distresses and mockery of the saints," a reference perhaps to ascetics whose activities had also been disturbed.[103]

We might come to reconsider Z'ura's initial purpose in travelling to the imperial capital by better situating his visit within the wider chronology of Justinian's reign. As we have seen, John does not give a date for Z'ura's arrival in Constantinople. But, we may confidently place it between 535 and 536. 535 was suggested as the likely year of his appearance in the city by W.H.C. Frend, on the basis of a letter written by Palestinian monks in 536, which complained of his activities there.[104] A reference to his visit

survives among the final batch of letters composed by Severus of Antioch, before his death in 538.[105] It would seem clear from the freedom which Z‘ura enjoyed, and the apparent patronage shown to him, that he met with Justinian before the dramatic hardening of imperial policy towards anti-Chalcedonians in 536. A breakdown of talks between supporters and opponents of the Council resulted in the promulgation of *Novels* 42 in August that year, which explicitly condemned Z‘ura, whilst also ordering the burning of Severus’ writings, and the condemnation of his supporters as heretics.[106] It was presumably in the wake of this event that, as the *Life* records, Z‘ura was sent into exile with the anti-Chalcedonian Patriarch of Alexandria, Theodosius.[107]

But, if we accept that Z‘ura did come to Constantinople during this period, then John’s account of religious persecution appears to be somewhat out of place. 535-536 marked a high point of relations between the Eastern Roman authorities and the Empire’s anti-Chalcedonian leadership. Justinian had even allowed the consecration of Anthimus, an opponent of the Council, as Patriarch of Constantinople in 535. It is possible that local zealots, perhaps led by the notorious Chalcedonian bishop of Amida, Abraham bar Kayli (527-557), orchestrated a campaign of persecution against Z‘ura and his followers. But, as Volker Menze has demonstrated, the *Lives*’ coverage of such persecution is unreliable and often prone to exaggeration.[108] An initial section of the *Life of Z‘ura* claims that its subject, in fact, enjoyed close relations with the local bishop.[109] Moreover, details given by the second book of John’s *Ecclesiastical History*, as they survive in the accounts of Michael the Syrian and Ps. Dionysius of Tel Mahre, suggest that Abraham’s attacks on anti-Chalcedonians in this period mostly occurred later, following the promulgation of *Novels* 42, when Ephrem of Antioch began his ‘descent on the East.’[110]

With this in mind, then, it would seem possible that the cause of Z‘ura’s removal from his pillar, and subsequent journey to Constantinople, was the issue of *Novels* 5 in March 535. This not only fits with the chronology established above, but represents the most obvious means by which the holy man’s detractors could effect his removal in a context of rapprochement between Justinian’s empire and its anti-Chalcedonian subjects. By falling foul of its provisions, Z‘ura gave unimpeachable grounds for Abraham, or whoever else, to strike. John records that letters sent by local officials to Justinian prior to Z‘ura’s arrival at court, which presented the grounds for his removal, described him as a

"troublemaker," and not a heretic.[111] Excepting the fantastical dialogue between the emperor and holy man over the doctrine of Chalcedon, John's account appears concerned, primarily, to defend its subject's ascetic lifestyle. Though hardly unique in itself, it is tempting to think that the text is so insistent on this point because Z'ura's opponents had originally framed his deposition in orthopraxic terms. These details of the story may have been partly, later obscured to better fit with the *Lives'* broader, melancholic narrative of Chalcedonian persecution.

Charismatic and independently-minded, Z'ura's presence on his pillar was likely to have undermined the authority of the bishops appointed to enforce Justinian's legislation on the monastic life. Unlike his anchoritic contemporaries Barsanuphius and John, he in no way adhered to the rulings on static coenobitism contained in *Novels 5*, veering from the practice of ostentatious public asceticism, to open interference in local and imperial politics. John appears to use his visit to Constantinople, in part, to contradict Justinian's view of correct ascetic behaviour. We have already noted that the *Lives*, as a collection, strongly favoured active involvement by monks in contemporary social and politic life, contrary to the provisions of the *Novels*. However, the encounter between Z'ura and Justinian also mounts a clear, philosophical challenge to the emperor's image of the proper relations between holy men and the imperial establishment.

An early section of John's account had already seen its subject produce a miraculous flood to end a drought, winning praise from both a bishop and a "judge," who had both failed to address it.[112] He is later shown to defeat in argument an assembly of bishops convened by Justinian to disprove his views.[113] However, in lambasting and then humiliating the emperor, who is forced to beg him for relief, Z'ura completely inverts the orthopraxic model set out in the *Novels*. Justinian is then forced to defer to the holy man's superior authority, granting him powers to protect the poor, and consulting him on matters of policy.[114] According to John, "many significant matters were resolved by him before the emperor and all the senators." These supposedly included the repeal of at least one of Justinian's religious laws, in which anti-Chalcedonians had been denied the right of assembly.[115] Leppin has argued that we should view the leniency shown by Justinian in his treatment of Z'ura as part of an imperial attempt to neuter ascetic criticism, through calculated displays of humility.[116] However, in John's

account, the emperor and his advisors are simply made to look weak in the face of Z‘ura’s attacks. Leppin not only appears to take the text’s claims far too literally, but also fails to note Justinian’s condemnation of Z‘ura in *Novels* 42.

It is difficult to avoid the impression that John had the monastic rulings of the *Novels* in his sights, when composing this contrived account of events at Constantinople. He not only has Z‘ura reject each of the key tenets of the Justinian’s legislation in turn, but challenges the very basis of imperial authority over ascetics. His efforts both reflect the likely reach of the *Novels*, and the possibility that Z‘ura had been punished for disobeying them.

Texts on Abraham of Farshut

Further, compelling evidence for the enforcement of Justinian’s monastic legislation, however, also appears in the Coptic panegyrics of Abraham of Farshut. As we have already seen, these are problematic texts and clearly products of a much later period than that which they describe. Frustratingly, many lines, or even whole pages, of the original codices are missing, including crucial sections on events at Justinian’s court in the *First Panegyric of Abraham of Farshut* and *On Abraham of Farshut*.[117] But, in spite of these limitations, the panegyrics appear to preserve fragments of a much older hagiographical tradition of Abraham of interest to our enquiry: one which reveals something of the divisions created by imperial legislation on ascetic orthopraxy within the powerful Egyptian monastic movement.[118] This would also support a view advanced by Goehring, that the texts preserve contemporary details of a schism which erupted among Abraham’s following his deposition by Justinian.

From what survives of these accounts, it is possible to give a brief summary of the circumstances which led to the deposition.[119] Having summoned the holy man to Constantinople, the texts agree that the emperor sought to enter into communion with him, but that Abraham refused to comply.[120] They preserve different versions of the dialogue between them that followed, but agree that it resulted in Abraham’s removal as archimandrite of the Pachomian federation. It is claimed that some among the holy man’s followers favoured a compromise with Justinian, even accepting communion with the

emperor.[121] The *Excerpt on Abraham from a panegyric of Manasseh* goes further, recording that the holy man's original summons had, in fact, followed a complaint made against him by a group of Pachomian monks, led by one Pancharis. It preserves what it claims was the address made by Pancharis to denounce Abraham before Justinian.[122] But between them, the texts do not provide a clear account of what happened to the holy man after his deposition, variously suggesting that he was imprisoned, or that he returned to Egypt to found another monastery.

Like Z'ura, Abraham's 'crime' ostensibly was to refuse communion with the emperor. It is naturally assumed that his story thus represents another instance of Justinianic persecution against a prominent anti-Chalcedonian. However, the references to the Chalcedonian Controversy found in the texts are perfunctory and appear to have little bearing on their broader narrative. As Goehring argues, formulaic, polemical attacks against Chalcedonian 'villains,' Justinian among them, were an obligatory feature of later Coptic hagiographies.[123] When these are placed to one side, a different picture emerges. In all three accounts of Abraham's appearance before the emperor, we find evidence of a conflict seemingly provoked by the enforcement of imperial orthopraxic rulings, at the expense of local traditions.

The texts' reports of the schism which occurred within the Pachomian federation appear to support this view. They suggest that Abraham's followers were divided, not over doctrine, but between those who were willing to accept Justinian's monastic laws, and those who regarded them as an affront to the authority of the *Rule of Pachomius*. Pancharis, who is said to have replaced Abraham, is described by the *Excerpt* as "the one who would turn away from the canonical rules of our father the prophet, Apa Pachomius.[124]" He is claimed to have offered before Justinian to "carry out every order of… the emperor through a command of royal authority.[125]" Conversely, the *First Panegyric on Abraham* describes Abraham as "the saint to whom our fathers…bequeathed their rules.[126]"

On Abraham of Farshut appears to make further allusion to the tensions which existed between these rival sources of instruction to ascetics. When Abraham arrives in Constantinople, its author claims that Justinian ordered him to stay with the anti-Chalcedonian patriarch Theodosius, "according to the custom of your fathers.[127]" However, when the holy man refuses and the emperor later demands an explanation, Abraham reproaches him, exclaiming, "You ask about the custom of our fathers. We have not heard

that the faith has changed since the time of our fathers.[128]" Here we appear to find a clear statement of disdain for the emperor's attempts to regulate ascetic behaviour, pointing, perhaps, to a contemporary layer for the text.

Throughout the panegyrics, Justinian is accused of seeking to overturn the orthopraxic model set out in the *Rule of Pachomius*. Once Abraham had been deposed, the author of *On Abraham of Farshut* claims that many of his monks refused to accept the emperor's initial choice of his successor, arguing that the *Rule* forbade any man from holding the office of archimandrite who was not a virgin.[129] The remainder of this discussion has been lost, but elsewhere the text may be seen to taunt Justinian's rulings, expressing its author's admiration for the activities of wandering ascetics, who "conquered the empire through faith.[130]" However, in a further scene of the *First Panegyric on Abraham*, we perhaps also find a rebuttal of imperial legislation which could be seen to play on the language used in the fifth chapter of *Novels* 133. Its author seemingly contradicts Justinian's promise that ascetic adherence to the law would bring peace and prosperity for all. Abraham is shown to warn the Pachomians not to "abandon the commandments and laws of the Lord that our fathers laid down for us," later specifying that he is referring to the Rules of Pachomius and Shenoute.[131] He specifically claims that this would cause them to suffer, "even if the whole world were flourishing." But, by remaining loyal to their orthopraxic traditions, they could expect to be blessed, even if the rest of the world lay "in distress.[132]"

However, that Abraham's deposition was a result of his resistance to the enforcement of Justinian's monastic legislation is finally, strongly suggested by the language of Pancharis' address the emperor, as reported by the *Excerpt*. Pancharis indicts the holy man as a "criminal" for "opposing the emperor," but makes no mention of his doctrinal views.[133] Abraham's accuser apparently professed himself willing to celebrate the Eucharist with Justinian, if the emperor should choose him to lead the Pachomian federation. However, Goehring's conclusion that this is evidence a coup by a 'Chalcedonian' faction within the federation would seem somewhat excessive.[134] In any event, Pancharis and his supporters are far more visibly motivated by the desire to demonstrate their adherence to Justinian's policies in the *Excerpt's* account, than by obvious religious zeal. Significantly, this would suggest that both supporters and opponents of Chalcedon were engaged in the processes of responding to Justinian's laws, regardless

of their doctrine. The texts on Abraham appear to preserve an account of the contemporary struggle over the reception of the *Novels* which, though inevitably corrupted, was still part of the institutional memory of Egyptian monasteries centuries later.

CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to present evidence of the influence exerted by Justinian's rulings on ascetic orthopraxy over Late Antique monasteries and their members. Using the examples of Sabas, Z'ura, and Abraham of Farshut, it has suggested that an imprint of the emperor's *Novels* is visible in surviving, monastic accounts of the mid-sixth century. These monastic laws can thus be seen to have had a perceptible effect upon the activities of monks and holy men. They appear to have stoked division among ascetics in a conflict independent of the ongoing schism over the Council of Chalcedon.

For one thing, these findings suggest that monastic views on matters of orthopraxy were often far more flexible than we might assume. Cyril's Sabaites, the Pachomians led by Pancharis, and the anonymous compiler of the *Questions and Answers* of Barsanuphius and John, all appear to have proclaimed their support for the emperor's right to legislate on fundamental aspects of their ascetic practice. Their actions show that the simple division of monasteries into rival 'Chalcedonian' and 'anti-Chalcedonian' camps is insufficient as an explanation for contemporary conflict between them. Whilst John and the Egyptian biographers of Abraham clearly opposed Justinian's interference in monastic affairs, the empassioned defence of local ascetic tradition found in their works may be seen as a reaction, at least in part, to the more permissive attitude adopted by many of their contemporaries.

Whether it was the prospect of imperial patronage, or the threat of Roman arms, that lent the *Novels* their appeal to ascetics may prove difficult to determine. But, the accounts of the *Life of Sabas* and the texts on Abraham suggest that, by the latter part of Justinian's reign, even the most powerful Eastern monasteries were forced to confront them. It may be possible that the monks of Thavatha and the Judaean Desert were affected by the wider processes of social and economic decay evident, at least in Palestine, following the destructive Samaritan revolts of 529 and 556, and the outbreak of the

'Justinianic' plague in ca. 541.[135] But, I would argue that the treatment received by Z'ura and Abraham also points to the effective enforcement of the *Novels* by the imperial authorities.

This final point may have some bearing upon our broader view of the state of religious politics in the mid-sixth century. At the close of her recent survey of the Seridos monastery texts, Lesieur concluded that Justinian's monastic legislation achieved a "pyrrhic victory" over ascetics, whose position it only acted to further strengthen and legitimise.[136] Following the remarkable work of Peter Brown, it is not uncommon to regard the social and political influence held by holy men in this period as rivalling, and undermining, that of the Empire's traditional establishment. Anti-Chalcedonian hegemony in Egypt and Syria is often also thought to have substantially reduced the reach of imperial religious policy by the 530s and 540s. However, none of these developments appears to have proved an effective barrier to the partial realisation of Justinian's policies, as expressed in the *Novels*.

Rather, the reception of these monastic laws in our texts may suggest that the Late Antique triumph of the holy man has been somewhat overstated. Monks would seem to have held few advantages in their dealings with Constantinople, with power resting very firmly on the side of the emperor and his officials. We need not assume that every trivial provision prescribed by the *Novels* was enforced. But together, they appear to have had the broader effect of underlining imperial authority over ascetics, compelling demonstrations of obedience from some, and providing a pretext for the punishment of others. Their provisions point to the assertive, and at times aggressive, stance taken by Justinian in confronting recalcitrant monks: one from which the pretence of imperial "humility" described by Leppin appears to be wholly absent.[137] This is not to propose an outmoded, 'Caesaropapist' view of the relationship between Eastern Roman emperors and the Church. But, from the examples of Z'ura and Abraham, we may conclude that ascetic dissidents and their followers were no match for the marshalled resources of Justinian's state.

[1] Harmut Leppin, "Power from Humility: Justinian and the Religious Authority of Monks," in *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. Andrew Cain and Noel Lenski, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 155-164; Benedicte Lesieur, "Le monastère de Séridos sous Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza: Un monastère conforme à la législation impériale et ecclésiastique?" *REB*, 69, (2011): 5-47; Phil Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the end of Late Antiquity*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 52, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 15-22.

[2] Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae*, ed. E. Schwartz, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 49/2 (Leipzig: Verlag Hinrichs 1939), 85-200; John of Ephesus, *Life of Z'ura*, (PO 17:18-35); Anonymous panegyrics on Abraham of Farshut in White Monastery Codices GC and GB, ed. J.E. Goehring, *Politics, Monasticism, and Miracles in Sixth Century Upper Egypt, A Critical Edition and Translation of the Coptic Texts on Abraham of Farshut*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 69, (Tübingen; Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 72-109. Goehring has entitled the GC codex texts, *First Panegyric on Abraham of Farshut*, and *On Abraham of Farshut* and I will follow these conventions in this paper. The relevant text in GB codex (forming pp.15-36 of the manuscript, as it survives) is an *Excerpt on Abraham of Farshut from a Panegyric on Manasseh*.

[3] *Codex Justinianus*, 1.2.19-25; 1.3.40-54, ed. Paul Kreuger, (CIC 2:16-18, 25-38).

[4] Primarily: *Novellae Constitutiones*, 5, 7, 9, 79, 123, 133, ed. Rufold Schoell and Wilhelm Kroll, (CIC 3:28-35, 48-64, 91, 388-390, 593-625, 666-676.

[5] For an overview, see: Caroline Humfress, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 161-184.

[6] Timothy G. Kearley, "The Creation and Transmission of Justinian's Novels," *Law Library Journal*, 102.3, (2010), 377-397, 378-380.

[7] See: Branko Granić, "Die rechtliche Stellung und Organisation der greichischen Kloster nach dem Justinianischen Recht," *BZ*, 29, (1929-1930), 6-34; Leo Ueding, "Die Kanones von Chalkedon in ihrer Bedeutung für Mönchtum und Klerus," *Das Konzil von Chalkedon, Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Alois Grillmeier and Heinricht Bacht, (3 vols.), (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1953), 2.569-676.

[8] *CJ* 1.3.43; 1.3.46, (CIC 2:29-30, 33-34).

[9] Julia Hillner, "Monastic Imprisonment in Justinian's Novels," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 15.2, (2007), 205-237. Hillner surveys a group of *Novels* issued up to 556, including some of those examined here in depth, which prescribe detention in a monastery as a legal punishment for higher clergy and members of the elite. *Novels* 137, dated to 565, insisted that local synods be convened to discuss accusations made against abbots, monks, and monasteries.

[10] Charles Frazee, "Late Roman and Byzantine Legislation on the Monastic Life from the Fourth to Eighth Centuries," *CH* 51, (1982), 263-279; Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church, The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 163-177.

[11] *CTh*, 12.1.63.

[12] *CTh*, 16.3.1.

[13] *CTh*, 16.3.2.

[14] On this subject, see: Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks. Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

[15] Henry Chadwick, "The Exile and Death of Flavian of Constantinople," in *JThS*, (new series) 6, (1955), 17-34.

[16] For example: Canons 2, 7, 8, 12, 13, 17, 18 of the Council of Gangra, ed. P.P. Joannou, *Discipline général antique (IVe-IXe s.)*, vol. 1.2: *Les canons des synods particuliers*, (Rome: Tipografia Italo-Orientale 'S. Nilo' 1962), 85-99; for discussion, see: Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 4-13.

[17] Canon 4, *(*ACO 2.1.2:159).

[18] Ueding, "Die Kanones," 660-676.

[19] Frazee, "Late Roman and Byzantine Laws," 272.

[20] *Novels* 5. Preface, (CIC 3:28).

[21] *Novels* 5.1, (CIC 3:28-29).

[22] *Novels* 5.3, (CIC 3:31-32).

[23] *Novels* 5.9, (CIC 3:34-35).

[24] *Novels* 5.4, 5.7, (CIC 3:32, 33).

[25] *Novels* 67.2, (CIC 3:345).

[26] *Novels* 133.6, (CIC 3:674-676).

[27] Caner, *Wandering, Begging, Monks*, 12-15.
[28] *Novels* 79.1, (CIC 3:388-389).
[29] *Novels* 123. 27, (CIC 3:614).
[30] *Novels* 133.3, (CIC 3:669-671).
[31] *Novels* 133.1, (CIC 3:667-668).
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] *Novels* 133.5, (CIC 3:672-674).
[35] *Novels* 133.6, (CIC 3:674-676).
[36] *Novels* 133.2, (CIC 3:669).
[37] *Novels* 133.3, (CIC 3:669-671).
[38] *Novels* 133.1, (CIC 3:667-668).
[39] *Novels* 133. Preface, (CIC 3:667-668).
[40] Ibid.
[41] *Novels* 133.5, (CIC 3:674, 8-16).
[42] *Novels*, 17.1, 133. Preface, 133.5, (CIC 3:118, 666-667, 672-674).
[43] Volke Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 57, passim.
[44] Lesieur, "Le monastère," 35, 46.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Lesieur, "Le monastère," 25-26.
[47] Lesieur, "Le monastère," 5, 8-9, 14, 43.
[48] For example: Barsanuphius and John, *Letters*, 360, 595, (SC 450:382-384, SC 451:792-794).
[49] Lesieur, "Le monastère," 21.
[50] Barsanuphius and John, *Letters*, 830, 831, 833, 834, (SC 468:306, 308, 310, 312).
[51] Barsanuphius and John, *Letters*, 600-607, (SC 451:804-842).
[52] Francois Neyt, *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza: Correspondance*, (SC 426:33-34).
[53] Lesieur, "Le monastère," 13.
[54] Barsanuphius and John, *Letters*, 600-607, (SC 451:804-842).
[55] Barsanuphius and John, *Letters*, 793-794, 802-803, (SC 468:254-256, 262-266); Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 108-111.
[56] Jan-Eric Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of anti-Chalcedonian Monasticism*, (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2002), 166-175.
[57] Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, iv.33, ed. Joseph Bidez and Léon Parmentier, 182. Eustochius' intervention is undated, but he was patriarch from 552/553-563/564.
[58] As late as the ninth century, the reputation of Barsanuphius and his disciple, Dorotheus, was the subject of fevered debate in Palestine, with confusion among Church leaders over whether they should be celebrated, or identified with two heretics of the same name, condemned by the seventh-century patriarch, Sophronius. For summary, see: Neyt, *Correspondance*, (SC 426:24-25); Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples*, 29-30.
[59] Neyt, *Correspondance*, (SC 468:25-32): Hevelone-Harper has argued that the emperor concerned was Anastasius and dated the episode to ca. 518: *Disciples*, 110-113.
[60] Goehring, *Politics, Monasticism, and Miracles*, 72-121.
[61] Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 50, (TU 49/2:139-141).
[62] John of Ephesus, *Life of Z 'ura*, (PO 17:20-21).
[63] Cyril claims that Sabas had earlier visited the emperor Anastasius, whilst the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* describe appearances at Constantinople by other Mesopotamian holy men, Maro the Solitary, and Thomas and Stephen. Similar scenes are especially prevalent elsewhere in the slightly later, Syriac monastic literature of the Ṭur 'Abdin. For this, see: Andrew Palmer, *Monk and Mason the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Ṭur 'Abdin,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 49-72, 113-140.
[64] Goehring, *Politics, Monasticism, and Miracles*, 57.
[65] Ibid. 67.
[66] This analysis of the *Life of Sabas* builds upon work which was recently, kindly cited by Phil Booth: *Crisis of Empire*, p. 16, n. 42.
[67] Leppin, "Power from Humility," 156-161.
[68] Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 16.
[69] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 30, (TU 49/2:115).
[70] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 39, (TU 49/2:129-130).
[71] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 28, (TU 49/2:113); Bernard Flusin, *Miracle et histoire dans l'oeuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis*, (Paris: Études augustiniennes 1984), 137-154.

[72] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 8, (TU 49/2:92).
[73] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 57, TU 49/2:152-157). cf. *Novels* 79.
[74] Cyril, *Vita Euthymii*, (TU 49/2:)
[75] Cyril, *V. Euth*, 9, 17-18, (TU 49/2:17-18, 27-29).
[76] Cyril, *V. Euth*, 27, (TU 49/2:41-45).
[77] Cyril, *V. Euth*, 30, 33, (TU 49/2: 48, 52).
[78] Cyril, *V. Euth*, 39, (TU 49/2:59); Yizhar Hirschfeld, "Euthymius and his Monastery in the Judean Desert," *Liber Annuus*, 43, (1993), 339-371.
[79] See: Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 15-22.
[80] Flusin, *Miracle et histoire*, 73-76.
[81] Daniël Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy: a new perspective on Cyril of Scythopolis' monastic hagiographies as historical sources for sixth-century Origenism*, Studia Anselmiana (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo Sant'Anselmo, 2001), 270-285.
[82] Brian Daley, "The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium," in *JThS*, (new series), 17, (1976), 333-369.
[83] Cyril, *Vita Cyriacii*, 11-14, (TU 49/2:229-231).
[84] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 87, (TU 49/2:194).
[85] Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 17, quoting: Cyril, *V. Sab*, 73, (TU 49/2:178).
[86] Ibid.
[87] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 72, (TU 49/2:175. 1-4).
[88] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 72, (TU 49/2: 175. 5-8).
[89] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 71, (TU 49/2: 174. 2-3).
[90] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 71, (TU 49/2: 174. 4-5).
[91] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 51-54, (TU 49/2: 142-147). Cf. Leppin, "Power from Humility," 157, 162.
[92] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 74, (TU 49/2:178. 19-27).
[93] Cyril, *V. Sab*, 74, (TU 49/2: 178. 27-29).
[94] See: Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, 5.6-9, ed. Dewing, 343-359.
[95] I am grateful to István Perczel for sharing with me his unpublished paper on this subject, entitled: "Hagiography as a historiographic genre: from Eusebius to Cyril of Scythopolis and Eustratius of Constantinople," delivered at the 'Christian Hagiography between Empires (4th-8th centuries)' conference in Budapest, October 2014, and to be published in a conference volume by Peeters. Its findings will form part of a broader study of the Syriac Cyril in his forthcoming book: I. Perczel, *Origénistes ou théosophes? Histoire politique d'un mouvement doctrinal des Ve-VIe siècles*, (Paris: Les belles lettres, forthcoming).
[96] John of Ephesus, *Life of Z'ura*, (PO 17:23-25).
[97] John of Ephesus, *Life of Z'ura*, (PO 17:27).
[98] John of Ephesus, *Life of Z'ura*, (PO 17:35).
[99] Philip Wood, "Excluded from Power? The Boundaries of Orthodoxy in the Works of Athanasius and John of Ephesus," in *An Age of Saints? Power, Conflict, and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity*, ed. P. Sarris, M. Dal Santo, and Phil Booth, (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 62-77, 70-72; Idem, *We Have no King but Christ*: *Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c.400-585)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 182.
[100] John of Ephesus, *Life of Z'ura*, (PO 17:19-21).
[101] Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 84-86.
[102] Wood, *No King but Christ*, 186.
[103] John of Ephesus, *Life of Z'ura*, (PO 17:21).
[104] *ACO* 3, p. 181; W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 270-272; Harvey, *Asceticism and Society*, 84.
[105] Severus of Antioch, *Sixth Book of Letters*, iii.2 ed. Brooks, vol. 2:262-267.
[106] *Novels*, 42.3, (CIC 3:267-268).
[107] John of Ephesus, *Life of Z'ura*, (PO 17:35).
[108] Menze, *Justinian and the Making*, 111, 123-124.
[109] John of Ephesus, *Life of Z'ura*, (PO 17:19).
[110] Ps. Dionysius, *Chronicle*, 37, ed. ; Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, 9.26, ed. Chabot, 2.223-224; See: Harvey, *Asceticism and Society*, 63.
[111] John of Ephesus, *Life of Z'ura*, (PO 17:21-22).
[112] John of Ephesus, *Life of Z'ura*, (PO 17:19).
[113] John of Ephesus, *Life of Z'ura*, (PO 17:22-23).
[114] John of Ephesus, *Life of Z'ura* (PO 17:27).
[115] This may be a misplaced reference to *Novels 42*.
[116] Leppin, "Power from Humility," 159-161.

[117] Chapter five of the *First Panegyric on Abraham of Farshut* is missing: Goehring, *Politics, Monasticism, and Miracles*, 78; The text entitled by Goehring as *On Abraham of Farshut* begins midway through its account of events at Constantinople: Goehring, *Politics, Monasticism, and Miracles*, 102.
[118] Goehring, *Politics, Monasticism, and Miracles*, 67.
[119] A longer and more detailed synoptic account may be found in: Goehring, *Politics, Monasticism, and Miracles*, pp. 33-40.
[120] *First Panegyric on Abraham of Farshut*, 5.6, ed. Goehring, 78; *On Abraham of Farshut*, 1.1, ed. Goehring, 102.
[121] Excerpt on Abraham of Farshut from a *Panegyric on Manasseh*, iv.4, ed. Goehring, 112.
[122] *Excerpt*, 2.4-5, ed. Goehring, 110, 112.
[123] Goehring, *Politics, Monasticism, and Miracles*, 43.
[124] *Excerpt*, 2.2, ed. Goehring 110.
[125] *Excerpt*, 4.4, ed. Goehring, 112.
[126] *First Panegyric on Abraham*, 21.3, ed. Goehring, 98, 100.
[127] *On Abraham of Farshut*, 1.2, ed. Goehring, 102.
[128] *On Abraham of Farshut*, 2.2, ed. Goehring, 104.
[129] *On Abraham of Farshut*, 7.2 ed. Goehring 110).
[130] *On Abraham of Farshut*, 3.1, ed. Goehring, 104.
[131] *First Panegyric*, 11.2, ed. Goehring, 86.
[132] *First Panegyric*, 11.3, ed. Goehring, 86.
[133] *Excerpt*, 4.2, ed. Goehring, 112.
[134] Goehring, *Politics, Monasticism, and Miracles*, 64-65.
[135] Now see: Nancy Benovitz, "The Justinianic Plague: evidence from the dated Greek epitaphs of Byzantine Palestine and Arabia," *JRA*, 27, (2014), 487-498.
[136] LESIEUR, "Le monastère," 46-47.
[137] Leppin, "Power from Humility," 164.